

JUDI JEAN ZIMMERMAN

BORN, MAY 6, 1953, DIED, JANUARY 10, 1981
IN VILLA HERMOSA, TABASCO, MEXICO

Judi Jean Zimmerman was born May 6, 1953. She lived her first four years in Castle Rock, and then moved with her family to Camas, Washington.

From the 4th grade through high school, Judi enjoyed summer camp at Ocean Park, and was a constant letter writer with friends from camp. She loved the out-of-doors and enjoyed the Christian fellowship with friends.

In addition to Ocean Park camp, her high school summers included work camps with her Camas United Methodist youth fellowship: Ensenada, Mexico to Kenai, Alaska with the Nooksack Indians. She also workcamped through the Red Bird Mission in Appalachia and with the migrant workers in Sunnyside. She developed a sensitive, caring spirit towards people in need, especially other cultures, particularly the Mexicans.

She also attended Young Life Malibu camp, and Beyond Malibu, growing in Christian faith and enjoying being outdoors. Following Ocean Park summer camp in 1970, she participated in Mission USA with the Tacoma First United Methodist church. In 1972 she attended Young Life camp in Europe, increasing her interest in languages and people of other cultures.

She served as a Page in the legislature and later worked as a bill room clerk, stimulating her awareness of the needs and concerns of the people of Washington State.

She attended the University of Puget Sound two years and during the summer attended Spanish language school in Saltillo, Mexico. Transferring to the University of Washington, Judi graduated with an English degree in 1976. From her camp letter-writing days, she always enjoyed writing and expressing her thoughts at the written word.

**Note. Information provided by her father, Hal Zimmerman from his book, "GRANDPA ZIM'S MEMORIES. People, Press, Politics, Peace...1923-2001.*

How did an innocent, loving, gentle young woman from Camas, Washington, who genuinely cared about people, end up in an unmarked pauper's grave in Mexico? Her parents, Hal and Judy Zimmerman, were well respected in the community. Her Mother was from a prominent Seattle family, and had been recognized for her musical talent and many achievements. Her Father was involved with many community activities and was a State Representative and Senator. Hal and Judy owned the local Camas-Washougal Post Record. They had traveled extensively throughout all seven continents, and Hal had written numerous accounts of their adventures. Her older sister, the last family member to see Judi alive, had built a successful career in San Francisco, while her brother, Steve, a General Contractor, stayed in the local area to raise his growing family.

For an account of 1

HER LAST JOURNEY

Judi Jean Zimmerman, Continued

Judi Jean left for her fifth trip to Mexico on December 7, 1980. Her interest in Mexico and the people there escalated after work camps at Ensenada, and visits to Saltillo, near Monterrey. She lived with the Jesus Barrida D. family and quickly learned to speak Spanish. Her fascination with Mexico continued and she decided to make a pilgrimage to southern Mexico. Starting at Acapulco, she traveled by bus to Cuernavaca, then Puebla, Veracruz, Fortin of the Flowers, to Tuxtla Gutierrez.

Her letters and calls were regular, full of detail and enthusiasm for what she was doing, seeing and experiencing. She loved the people, the land, and the language.

She looked forward to visiting the Yucatan peninsula, where she met Anna Bell, a physician's daughter, and they soon became traveling companions. Judi's last letter from Tuxtla Gutierrez, mailed Jan. 10, didn't arrive in Camas until about Feb. 1. That disturbing letter said, "if you don't hear from me, something has happened to me." What led this kind and gentle person to mistrust those with whom she had previously felt close? What clues made her leery of the people she had once loved?

Fishermen found her strangulated body in a river at Villa Hermosa, State of Tabasco, Jan 12, a victim of foul play. The only identification found on her was a bus ticket, so she was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave. Such a tragic ending to an innocent girl from Camas, Washington!

In spite of many telephone calls and pleas for help to the Mexican Government as to her whereabouts, her parents and older sister, Karen, were frantic. Her brother, Steve felt impelled to go down to Villa Hermosa to search for her. When Steve called Rafael, Judi Jean's friend, he misled Steve, assuring him that she was traveling north. Hopeful reports that she might still be alive were shattered when the American Embassy at Mexico City eventually traced a missing body, and sent pictures to the Seattle FBI, to confirm the identity. Hal's brother, a Seattle physician, confirmed Judi's identity.

A detective hired by the Consulate assured Steve that he had enough evidence to bring the case to trial. Being able to track Judi's activities via a credit card, staking out the office of Anna Bell's father, exposing his illegal activities and the suspicious activity of Judi's so called "friends," eventually led to that trial, a year later. Steve remembers standing in 105-degree heat in the courtroom, answering questions for 5 hours. His composure and steadfastness did not waver. The fact that he was given 24-hour protection was significant to the importance and intensity of the trial. The local papers misidentified Steve as his father, "the Senator from Washington DC."

It was difficult for Steve, who was also a trusting person, to think that people with whom he had dined, and who had "helped" him to look for Judi's body, might actually be directly responsible for her death. Finally, Anna Bell, her former traveling companion, broke down and confessed everything, confirming the terrible actions of people in a land Judi loved.

Unfortunately, those former "friends" of Judi's were sentenced to only one year in prison, an extremely light sentence even for someone who had neither denied nor confessed to her murder, but most likely resulting in the probability that their wealthy families had bought their way out. The detective on the case remarked that the whole scenario was "Stranger than a Hollywood movie."

Steve wonders today if Anna Bell, who had acted as a decoy, ever had misgivings or thoughts of sorrow for her role in this terrible tragedy. His memories of the horrible ordeal have never faded.

A MEMORIAL SERVICE CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF JUDI JEAN ZIMMERMAN, WAS HELD AT
ON APRIL 18, 1981.